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# High School Seniors' Plans After Graduation: The Decision to Go to the Military, College, a Trade School, or Work

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HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS' PLANS AFTER GRADUATION:  
THE DECISION TO GO TO THE MILITARY, COLLEGE, A TRADE  
SCHOOL, OR WORK

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By  
Yasamin Shariat

August 2005



High School Seniors' Plans After Graduation: The  
Decision to go to the Military, College, a Trade  
School, or Work

Date Recommended July 15, 2005

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Directed by Drs. Joan Krenzin, Stephen Groce, and Douglas  
Smith

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This research analyzes the decision process of high school seniors in their postgraduation plans. Most of the participants are college bound, so students were compared and analyzed according to their preparedness for college as measured by the ACT. It seems that students go to college whether or not they are actually prepared for the experience. They seem to be more influenced by a societal push towards attending college than by anything else.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

My father always taught me that there is nothing more important in this world than education. He saw it as the only way to really succeed and was determined that all his children would become educated people. Once I asked him why he would not just spend all the money he spent on my college education and buy me a house. He answered,

When I'm gone, something can happen, and you may lose that house, and then I might as well have given you nothing. But, nothing can ever happen to your education; no one can ever take that away from you.

Education is something that one keeps no matter what else happens, but it also seems to be the easiest legal way to improve one's life chances. It allows people to reach new levels of financial stability and move themselves up the class ladder. In addition, it expands one's horizons and opens up new doors in just about every aspect of life. Given all these positive aspects to receiving education, it is disappointing that so many people do not receive a higher education.

This study will focus on higher education in Kentucky. The percentage of Kentuckians who hold a bachelor's degree

is surprisingly low even though it has improved in recent years. According to the 2000 U.S. census only 20.5 percent of those living in Kentucky have graduated from college. Even though that is a small proportion of the population, it is better than the 1990 census report in which only 13.6 percent of the population in Kentucky had graduated from college (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 212).

It is interesting to compare these data to the national average of college graduates, which was 25.6 percent in 2000 and 20.3 percent in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 212.) In addition, Kentucky is even lower in the percentage of college graduates when compared to states similar in population, industry, and size such as Tennessee. Tennessee has slightly more college graduates than Kentucky with 22 percent in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 212). This figure rose from the 1990 figure of 16 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 212). Both states rose in similar proportions in this ten year period, but Kentucky still has a lower proportion of the population with a college degree. The question is why higher percentages of students in other states go to college (U.S. Census Bureau 2002) while fewer individuals in Kentucky pursue higher education.

There are several possible answers. One is people feel there is nothing to gain from education. Another is that higher education has never really been presented as possible or necessary to them. A third is not having the financial means or knowledge of the availability of governmental help.

This decision comes down to choice, but the concern of this study is why these choices are being made. As social exchange theory discusses, we need to know what the opportunity costs are that are seen as more advantageous than the value of a higher education. Are these young adults being held back by financial constraints or by social constraints such as their family or peers? Is it possible that they do not have all the information available to make an informed decision?

This study attempted to learn what high-school seniors in one county in Kentucky plan to do after high school and what influenced their decisions. I conducted interviews with fifteen high school seniors at three public county high schools in a small city in Southcentral Kentucky.



## CHAPTER II

### THEORY

Regardless of the hurdles, every American has the option to go to college, but many Americans do not see it that way. There are many young people who do not view going to college as worth the trouble or even as necessary. They weigh their options and their resources and choose to start working, enter the military, go to a technical school, or enter college. Social exchange theory suggests that people analyze costs and benefits when making decisions. This theory can be used to help explain how the choice of what to do after high school is made.

Exchange theory deals with weighing the costs and profits of any given situation and can help to predict elementary social behavior (Nye 1978). The cost of a decision is that which is given up for the decision, and the profit is what is gained from the particular decision (Homans 1961). The assumption made here is that the student is fully informed when making this decision.

In this theory the reward gained for the action that is performed is seen as an advantage. In this case the act is their plans after finishing high school. A significant part of the importance of the reward is the value that it

holds for the individual. The more valuable a reward the more likely the reward will be pursued (Emerson 1990; Ritzer and Goodman 2004). If an individual does not value knowledge for the sake of knowledge, acquiring a college education is not seen as a valuable reward and is, thus, not a good incentive. But, if one sees much value in the pride of serving one's country, more costs will be sacrificed to reach that reward, and, thus, one would be more likely to join the military.

There are many propositions that help to better explain this basic concept. The first is that a person will do his/her best to seek rewards and avoid costs (Nye 1978). Thus, people want to gain the most advantages from performing a given action while incurring the fewest losses. So, these students want to make the action that seems to them to have the most positive outcome while incurring the least cost.

The second proposition is that, when costs are equal, the option with the most rewards will be chosen, and conversely the third is that rewards being equal the option with the least cost will be chosen (Nye 1978). This proposition goes further to explain the previous proposition in that people will do all they can to take the path with the most positive result.

The next two propositions deal with immediate and long-term outcomes. If the immediate rewards and cost are equal, one will choose the option with the best long term costs and rewards; and if the long term costs and rewards are equal, one will choose the option with the best immediate costs and rewards (Nye 1978). Not only are costs and rewards important in exchange theory, but the time at which one receives the costs and rewards is also of some importance.

In addition, individuals will choose options that require sacrifice at the present time in pursuit of a lofty ideal that will be achieved later (The Structure of... 2002). Going to college is a great example of this point. Attending college has immediate costs, such as time and money, but has the reward of being a college graduate. Thus, a person may exchange what can be viewed as a cost in the present while attempting to earn a reward in the future (Kelley and Thibaut 1978).

The last few propositions concern the time at which costs and rewards are seen as being equal. When timing is a factor, a person will choose the option that provides the most social approval or autonomy or the greatest financial advantage (Nye 1978).

The fact that people will choose the option with the most social approval is of great interest here. Social awards or approval are important to people because they tend to govern our associations with each other (The Structure of... 2002). Humans desire other humans to accept what they are doing, thus giving social approval value.

Social approval is seen as a generalized free reward (Nye 1978). We see it as a reward to have others agree and value our opinions and decisions. We will engage in activities for compliments and, thus, positive rewards from others, and we see these rewards as advantages (Kelley and Thibaut 1978). Social approval can come from many places: family, friends, teachers, church, or any social group of which the individual is a member. Social approval is gained when a decision is made that that particular social group finds valuable (Homans 1961). If one comes from a family for which attending college is valued, social approval is gained from the family for attending college. The same decision could gain social disapproval from one's friends if they do not view attending college as valuable.

One gains an idea of the social approval that a group will give from the past history of the group's reactions to their own actions and the actions of other members of the group (Homans 1961). In the case of the social group of

the family, if an older sibling entered the military and gained social approval for this action, the individual would be more likely to do the same if desiring to gain the family's approval. This thought process can be taken even farther to say that social exchanges occur only because of the benefits that we are attempting to earn from other people (Molm, Peterson, and Takashi 2001).

Furthermore, one is likely to make a decision based on past successes and failures (Forest and Mehier 2001). If an individual succeeded in classes such as auto mechanics in high school and not classes such as history, the individual is more likely to attend a technical school focusing on mechanics because success has been gained in that field. The likelihood of attending college, which requires classes such as history, would be less because the individual does not know if success would be possible. This rationalization can be extended to past successes and failures of others. If one has seen an older friend go straight to work after high school and have much success with this choice, it influences the student's choice.

It should be noted here that individuals compare the various alternatives that they have. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) define the comparison level of alternatives as the standard one uses in deciding how satisfactory something

may or may not be. When choosing between alternatives, people decide which alternative gives them the best rewards. This comparison of alternatives is influenced by all the outcomes that the individual is aware might occur (Thibaut and Kelley 1959). Thus, the students in this study compare all the alternatives that they are aware might possibly occur. They additionally compare the availability of the alternatives and choose the alternative that is the most favorable to their situations (Thibaut and Kelley 1959).

When an exchange occurs, emotions are evoked within the individual. These emotions, if positive, become an additional reward, and, if negative, become an additional cost (Guillet, Sarrazin, Carpenter, Trouiloud, and Cury 2002). For example, if one chooses an option that increases his or her status, such as earning his or her own paycheck, he or she feels satisfied and thus rewarded (Lawler and Thye 1999). If one chooses an option that makes him or her feel shame, like working full time because he or she could not enter the college of his or her choice, he or she is dissatisfied, and this result is viewed as a cost (Lawler and Thye 1999). Thus, the same decision can evoke different emotions in different people. The emotions evoked and the perception of what is a cost and what is a

reward are based on the individual's identity (Lawler and Thye 1999).

All the various interpretations of exchange theories share a common thread, the assumption that values are important (Molm et al. 2001). The question seems to arise regarding how to measure the importance of values and how to judge what is really a reward and what is really a cost (Molm et al. 2001). A reward to one person may be a cost to another and vice versa. Thus, the important issue comes to be what each individual views to be a reward and a cost.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The present generation of young people does not have the same opportunities as their parents, nor are they likely to attain the same levels of achievement (Symonds 2003). What is holding this new generation back? A big part of what is holding them back is their likelihood of not attending college.

Besides the option of going straight to work after high school, the only other options outside of college being considered in the present study are going to a technical school or the military. The option of going to a technical school is one that seems to be well used. There are 68,000 students enrolled in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, but there are also pitfalls with this option (Kentucky Community and... 2004 homepage). Until 1999 student aid was not possible for those attending technical schools, and even with the revision in the laws there are many obstacles, making it difficult to get money to attend a technical school (Burd 1999). High school graduates wanting to go to a technical school deal with



many of the same financial difficulties as those who pursue a college degree.

During adolescence young people are expected to make their first set of life-path choices (Gati and Saka 2001). The choices that they make at this time affect what they will be capable of achieving. Before even making the choice of what one will do after high-school graduation many are faced with the decision of what track to follow. This decision is made in the beginning of the high-school career at the age of thirteen or fourteen (LeTendre 1996).

In addition, students are expected to have a tentative plan as to what they want to do with their lives by the eleventh grade (Lane 2000). This plan is affected by how the students have or have not performed academically thus far and what they view as their top interest areas (Lane 2000; Okano 1995). After having typically picked a college or straight-to-work track at the beginning of high school, students are forced to narrow their choices even more by the age of sixteen or seventeen.

Students deal with internal and external conflicts when making these choices. The student must deal with his or her own personal preferences as well as the influence of those surrounding the individual (Gati and Saka 2001; Lane 2000). Outside influences include one's family, friends,

counselors, and teachers. All these people believe certain paths are the way to go, and students must at some point make a compromise between these possibly differing views and their own.

Thus, students' choices are made in relation to those around them. This choice is influenced by what those before them did and what those around them currently believe (LeTendre 1996). Furthermore, other life situations also affect the actual choice one is able and willing to make. These situations include various social groups and circumstances that will be discussed below. Even though there are many factors and people that influence a student's choice, the fact remains that the responsibility of this choice ultimately falls onto the student (LeTendre 1996).

I reviewed the different types of factors and circumstances that affect students' decisions as to what to do after graduation. I will discuss familial influences, school influences, financial considerations, and where Kentucky stands in comparison to other states.

### **Family's Characteristics**

Specific familial characteristics affect a student's choice. Characteristics that will be reviewed here are financial status, number of children in a family, family

interactions, parental education, parental support of education, and family dynamics.

### **Financial Status**

"The dumbest rich kids have as much chance of going to college as the smartest poor kids" (Gladiuex 2002, para. 8). Somehow this fact does not seem fair, but it is the case in this nation. The income of one's family has a very big impact on one's chances of going to college. The poor are less likely to go to college than the rich (Crosnoe, Mistry, and Elder 2002; Gladiuex 2002).

Poor students are aware of the fact that college is expensive and adjust their goals accordingly. Cost is the biggest obstacle students face when considering occupational aspirations (Davey 1993). They view the expense of college as the primary cost in the endeavor of reaching a professional career and many times do not see college as being cost effective.

The amount of money parents have impacts a child's chances of going to college in various ways. The most obvious way going to college is impacted by finances is by the ability to pay tuition, but there are other more subtle ways that also make a difference. Parental income impacts going to college because of the neighborhood in which one lives, the type of extracurricular activities one can

afford for one's children, the ability to pay for tutors, and other types of similar factors (Conley 2001). Students from higher socioeconomic statuses are more likely to attend college than those from lower socioeconomic statuses (Beattie 2002).

Parents' socioeconomic status may also be an indicator of whether a child does or does not go to college simply because a high socioeconomic status is an indicator of success (Levitt and Dubner 2005). Those who are successful tend to have a higher IQ and more education, both of which are likely to be passed on to their children (Levitt and Dubner 2005).

#### **Number of Children**

All of the above-mentioned things get harder to provide for one's child if one has multiple children; therefore, students with more siblings have a harder time receiving a formal education than those with fewer siblings (Conley 2001). The obvious reason is that there is less money to go around. A less obvious reason could simply be that in a bigger family the older children tend to take care of the younger children, making studying and especially going to college much more difficult.

### **Interaction**

Even if lower-income, high-school graduates are able to go to college, they are generally less prepared than students who come from higher-income families (Crosnoe et al. 2002). Gladiuex (2002, para. 17) points out that, while only fifty-three percent of low-income high-school graduates are ready for college, eighty-six percent of high-income, high-school graduates are ready for college.

### **Parents' Education and Their Support of Education**

For other than financial reasons parents indirectly affect the likelihood of their children going to college. Outside of pursuing a graduate degree (which does not really concern us here) the level of the parents' education has an effect on the educational achievement of their children (Conley 2001). Children with more highly educated parents are more likely to pursue higher education themselves, partly because it is expected of them to do so and they feel as if they have a birthright to college (Beattie 2002; LeTendre 1996). Thus, children of educated parents have been taught to value education and are more likely to pursue schooling (Levitt and Dubner 2005).

Parents also influence their children's decision of whether or not to go to college by their support or nonsupport of the idea of higher education. If parents

expect their child to go to college, then the child is more likely to take the steps to make it happen (Gladiuex 2002; Trusty 2002). In addition, when the parents are more enthusiastic about going to college (regardless of their financial level), they encourage their children in the direction of college, making it easier for their children to do what needs to be done to be able to receive a higher education (Crosnoe et al. 2002).

The student's occupational aspirations have an effect on the type of support a parent gives. Students who desire and are expected to enter into desired occupations receive more support from parents as well as from other people (Davey 1993). Davey also points out that students tend to receive the most support from their same-sex parent, even though generally mothers tend to be more supportive.

On the other hand, if parents do not believe it is possible for their child to go to college, they are less helpful in the very difficult process of getting into a school and being able to finance an education (Crosnoe et al. 2002). Many parents with lower incomes feel that there is nothing they can do to help their children go to college; therefore, they do nothing. If they believed they could make a difference, they would attempt to help their

children more with the task of getting into and staying in college (Crosnoe et al. 2002).

Parental support of education and specifically support of their own child's educational and occupational goals is very important. In general it has been found that parental support has a positive effect on students' goals and the things they attain (Trusty 2002). A specific way parental support and involvement helps students is by encouraging student involvement in extracurricular activities while in high school (Trusty 2002). When parents are more involved, students tend to become more involved in extracurricular activities.

### **Family Dynamics**

A family's networks also have an influence on the post-high-school path (Okano 1995). The connections and opportunities that these networks open up to students influence the path they will take. For instance, if a student has a father who through social networks can guarantee a job to his student after graduation, this student is more likely to go straight to work instead of pursuing higher education (Okano 1995).

In addition, parents' marital standing also affects the likelihood that a child will or will not apply to and attend college. Lillard and Gerner (1999) found that

sixty-nine percent of students living with both biological parents applied to college, while only sixty percent of those not living with both biological parents applied (p. 714). Furthermore, of students not living with biological parents only fifty-two percent attended college immediately following high-school graduation, while sixty-two percent of those living with both biological parents attended (Lillard and Gerner 1999, pp. 714-15). But, parent's marital status and, thus, the structure of the family a child is raised in has no affect on a child's academic abilities (Levitt and Dubner 2005).

### **High School Influences**

Parents are not the only important factor that affects what a high school graduate will do after graduation. There are many influences that come from the student's experiences in the classroom.

### **Curriculum**

It has been shown that, if we want our children to go to college, the groundwork cannot be laid in their senior year of high school; it must be laid earlier (Gladiuex 2002). Students need to be encouraged to want to learn and be challenged to keep them interested. This groundwork and encouragement will allow them to have a better perspective of the opportunities that are out there awaiting them.



Students who take advanced courses (advanced placement classes such as calculus) in high school not only have a higher likelihood of going to college but also a higher likelihood of succeeding in college (U.S. Department of ... 2002). Regardless of this fact only twenty-eight states require a student to pass algebra and geometry for high school graduation (Gladiuex 2002). Thus, these students are left on the opposite side of the spectrum from those students who are likely to attend college and succeed.

There are other options besides college for graduates, but in some cases those are getting slimmer. With the United States' focus on education and the white-collar world, not enough blue-collar workers are being trained. In the past students received workable skills in high school that would help them obtain a job afterwards, but that is not always the case anymore (Pruzan 2000). Classes such as shop are no longer being taught around the nation because they are not seen as being important, but this curriculum revision is not happening everywhere.

To many students grades may be the worst things ever, but they do have an impact on a student's chances of going to college. Not only do grades affect the schools that one does and does not get into, but they affect how much encouragement students get from their parents. Regardless

of income, if children make good grades, their parents are optimistic about their chances for higher education and, therefore, are helpful and encouraging (Crosnoe et al. 2002).

### **School Personnel**

Just as parents influence a student's future, so do high-school personnel, especially guidance counselors. Counselors and other educators can influence a student's long-term goals and development by helping the student to acquire skills early (Trusty 2002). Part of the importance of the counselor's position is in assisting the student in determining goals. It is crucial that students identify their personal areas of interest and disinterest to help in the post graduation decision (Lane 2000).

Furthermore, the school's culture has an impact on a student's goals and achievements. The most important part of that culture is the counseling program (McDonough and Jarsky forthcoming). It is, thus, clear that educators, and especially counselors, make a substantial difference in student choices after high school graduation.

### **School Culture**

Other aspects of the schools culture are also important, including the general atmosphere. Students who attend schools where they feel they have more of a voice

succeed better than students who attend schools where they feel silenced (Smyth and Hattam 2002). Thus, giving students a relative say in the functioning of their education seems to encourage success.

The school culture also includes whether a school meets the criteria of effective schools. These include such things as the school's expectations of its students and the emphasis that is placed on academics (Lezotte 1991). The more a school expects from its students, the more emphasis is placed on academics and the better the students should perform. These criteria include frequent monitoring of students' progress and providing a safe environment for learning to occur (Lezotte 1991). There also needs to be a sense of partnership between the school and parents (Lezotte 1991). Parents need to be involved in order for students to succeed in school so schools need to emphasize the importance of parental involvement. But, a student who wishes to succeed in school will do so regardless of the school that he or she are in (Levitt and Dubner 2005).

### Tracking

The schools that will be researched participate in the tracking system. This system consists of placing students in a certain track of classes near the beginning of their

high-school careers. Some tracks are geared toward college, some toward attending a technical school, and some toward a terminal high-school diploma. Research shows that tracking might make it more difficult for students to aspire to go to college. Students who are placed in or choose a less academically demanding track expect less from themselves and develop a more negative attitude toward school (Oakes 1985).

### **Financial Options for Higher Education**

Even if the parents and the students are optimistic about higher education, the question of financing automatically comes into play. Today education is more expensive than ever before, partly because more people are attempting to receive a higher education (Symonds 2003). The extra burden of providing a higher education has fallen on the students (Symonds 2003). Therefore, the reasoning some high school seniors might give for not going to college is financial. There are basically three different options a student perceives available when deciding how one will pay for college. They are none; loans, grants, and scholarships; and paying out of pocket.

Those who believe there to be no options are typically students from low-income families. This belief occurs mostly because they are not aware of the help that is out

there. Middle-class families tend to be more aware of alternative methods of payment as well as more aggressive in pursuing them; therefore, aid programs tend to help the middle class more than the lower class that is in greater need of help (Gladiuex 2002). Low-income families need to be made more knowledgeable of the options available to pay for college (Gladiuex 2002). Low-income families should not limit their educational opportunities because they do not think other options for payment exist (Moseman 2002). Low-income families need to make themselves aware of the opportunities that are available.

Once it has been realized that there are options for payment available, they need to be pursued. The best option for those not wanting to pursue outside money is to go to a junior college first. The cost of a junior college is often considerably less than that of a four-year institution. For example, in California a credit at a junior college costs only eleven dollars, and many junior colleges work with four-year universities, thus guarantying admission after the students have earned their associate's degrees (Morris 2003).

There are also many options for those wanting to spend all four years at the same institution, and there have been many attempts at making these options even better. Moseman

(2002) suggests that students choosing this route work for small scholarships as well as for the larger ones. All the small scholarships can add up and provide plenty of money to finance higher education. Government assistance can be improved in this area. Gladiuex (2002) and Moseman (2002) both made valid suggestions when they recommended that the government set up trusts for low-income students, thus setting aside money for low-income students to attend college.

The third option, paying for higher education out of pocket is not available to most. Very few families can afford to pay for college themselves, but the ones who can and do are able to alleviate a lot of problems that other families go through concerning college. These people remind us of the Gladiuex (2002) statement about the dumbest rich kids being able to go to college.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH METHODS

To find the reasons seniors are making the choices that they are making, the qualitative approach was used as opposed to the quantitative approach, even though the quantitative approach is more commonly used. There is no way to come up with all reasons that students might give for their choice, thus making a quantitative study very difficult in this situation.

Furthermore, high-school seniors probably are used to filling out surveys quickly without giving very much thought to their answers. This study requires detailed, considered answers, which is why I conducted one-on-one interviews. In addition, I believed by engaging the students in conversation they would be willing to provide me with more in-depth answers because I was able to ask probing follow-up questions.

Given the above reasons the qualitative approach was used to determine what fifteen high-school seniors in one county in Southcentral Kentucky plan to do after high-school graduation. The students came from three public

high schools in a county of approximately eighty thousand people.

Within the county in which my study occurred more than half (51.64%) of the students went to college after high school in 1996 (Kentucky Instructional Results... 1996). In addition, in the same year 7.4 percent attended a technical school and 29.93 percent went straight to work (Kentucky Instructional Results 1996, p. 18). It is unfortunate that data were not available for the number who proceeded to the military.

All three high schools were used because the personalities of the three schools are very different. The students at school A are predominantly from rural areas and are mostly lower- or middle-class. School B has many students who live near the city limits and has a good deal of ethnic diversity. The students in school C are predominantly the children of upper-middle-class families, even though many of them also live in rural areas.

Some of the students interviewed volunteered when I approached them during homeroom class with the permission of the schools. The project was explained and those who wished to participate signed up. It is unfortunate that many of these students later made the decision not to be interviewed



so I found participants through alternative means. I went to local businesses where I felt high-school seniors might work and explained my project to any that were present. Some agreed to set up an interview with me outside of work. I also contacted local church youth ministers in search of high-school seniors who might be willing to participate. Those who were willing to participate were supplied with my number and an interview was scheduled.

If the student wished to participate, the student signed an informed consent form, a copy of which is located in Appendix A. If the student was under the age of eighteen a legal guardian signed a written consent form, and the student signed a written assent form, copies of which are also located in Appendices B and C, respectively.

Once consent was granted, individual interviews were conducted with each student. Each interview lasted less than one hour on average and was conducted outside of regular school hours. The only people present at the interview were the student and I. All information will be kept confidential, and only pseudonyms are used to identify the students.

The interview consisted of a variety of questions, including questions concerning family influences, school

influences, social life, specific questions dealing with the student's plans after graduation, and demographics. The student was encouraged to expand on any question and allowed to refuse to answer any question (See Appendix D).

Family members and school faculty were not interviewed. The concern here is the reasons the students believe are valid for their decision. Even though other people may influence their decision, it is the conclusion the students have reached that is important.

After each interview the tape-recorded copies of the interview were transcribed. After all the interviews were conducted, conclusions were drawn based on the information the students presented. I analyzed and compared all the answers that were presented in all the interviews with each other as well as with other research on the topic.

The original intent was to compare students who were making different choices after graduation. I had hoped to have more variety in the post-graduation plans of my participants. But, when the majority of the participants had made the choice to go to college the focus of the study shifted slightly. Students were then compared and analyzed by their level of preparedness.

Students will be compared according to their ACT scores. For purposes of this paper students are considered

underprepared if their scores fall below 20 or they have not taken the test. The national average is 20.9, and the state average is 20.2 (ACT Assessment Score... 2005).

Because only 56 percent graduate in six years or less, I am assuming that a percent of those dropouts were underprepared (Graduation Rates For... 2003). Fourteen out of fifteen of the participants took the ACT exam and scored as follows:

Score	Students
16	1
18	1
19	2
20	2
21	2
22	1
25	1
26	1
28	1
29	1
30	1

Thus, this study consists of seven underprepared and eight prepared students

## **CHAPTER V**

### **FINDINGS**

Interviews were conducted with a total of fifteen students (4 males and 11 females). Of these interviews five were conducted with students from school A (all female), two were conducted with students from school B (both males), and eight were conducted with students from school C (6 females and 2 males). From this group of students fourteen are attending college (4 males and 10 females), none are attending a trade school, one is entering the military (a female), and none are entering full time employment). In examining preparedness for college, seven seem to be underprepared while eight seem to be prepared.

#### **Prepared and Underprepared Students**

Throughout the following chapter students will be categorized as prepared (P) or underprepared (U) for college based on their ACT scores. Those who earned an above average score on their ACT will be considered prepared, and those who earned below the average score will be considered underprepared.

Only one student has not taken either the ACT or the SAT test. Stacy (U), who is entering the military is planning on taking the ACT but has yet to actually take the test. The other fourteen students all took the test at least once. Four students actually took the test twice because they were not satisfied with their scores. The score of the students who took the test twice changed very little the second time; for some it actually decreased.

The national average score on the ACT is 20.9, while the average in Kentucky is only slightly lower at 20.2 (ACT Assessment Score... 2005). Thus, from this group of students six were at or below the national and state average, and eight were above both these averages. Only one of these students, Natalie, was at or below the average on her first test and above the average on her second test. But, her scores differ only a single point; she earned a 20 on her first test and a 21 on her second test and will be considered to be underprepared.

#### **Effects of Advantages and Disadvantages on Choice**

The views that these students have of the four choices were clearly expressed. They were asked for the advantages and disadvantages of attending college, a technical school, entering the workforce, and joining the military. Even though the students were all interviewed separately there

were many common threads of answers, regardless of the high school that they attended.

### **Advantages of College**

There were multiple replies given to the question posed about advantages of college. This question provoked extensive discussion by the participants, likely because such a high volume of them are on the path to college. Every single respondent cited that with a college degree one is able to earn more money and gain a better job. Dontaurs (P) stated it succinctly; "Well basically it's trying to get more education so you can end up in a better job after you graduate." The consensus of these students, seemed to be that the goal of college was a better career and success later in life and, thus, an attempt to avoid undesirable careers. Anna (U) states,

You get a better job. It's better for your career. It's better for your life. People that drop out of high school or just not go to college, they probably work at McDonalds.

Many of the students claimed that an advantage of going to college was just the pure experience and expected enjoyment of the endeavor; "I think the whole experience is going to be great" (Natalie (U)). They look forward to the freedom and projected enjoyment.

### Disadvantages of College

The students also stated multiple disadvantages to going to college; the primary ones mentioned were the lost time and money spent on the endeavor. A total of 12 students listed time and or money as disadvantages of college. Of these 12 students 11 took the ACT and eight are prepared students while three are under prepared students. They view the time in terms of the years spent when they could be engaging in other activities.

At least four years of your life, maybe, depending on your degree. It can be eight, you know, ten if you want to be a lawyer, doctor, you know. No telling how many years. (Suzy (U))

They also view the time in terms of the specific time spent studying.

I guess at some point I'm going to feel like I'm locked up in a room and unable to get out for four years. There's always the possibility of feeling like you've missed out on something because you were in the library studying. (Cassandra (P))

Money was viewed in terms of money spent.

I hear a lot of stories of people who come out of college and, you know, are in debt so many thousands of dollars, and they have to make that up. (Brandon (P))

Another disadvantage expressed by these students was leaving one's family and friends. They are basically afraid of weakening their current social networks and fear that future social networks that will develop at college

will not be as strong as the ones they are now involved in. They view the loss of social networks as a cost they pay to go to college. Three students expressed this concern (all three are under prepared students) but those who are moving away from home to attend college felt it more so: "Losing a lot of the people I know right now, which a lot of them are just wonderful people" (David (U)). There seems to be awareness that some of their relationships will not survive the change, and others will be affected by it.

#### **Advantages of Technical School**

Even though none of these students are attending technical school, some viewed advantages to the option and just felt that it was not the right choice for them personally. Four students could not think of a single advantage to technical schools, only one of these four is an underprepared student. David explained this viewpoint succinctly, "I guess if college isn't right for you, technical school would be good for you because college isn't right for everyone."

Six expressed the idea that it was faster (five of these six were prepared students). Three prepared students and one underprepared student said technical schools were more focused. The fact that this option was seen as being



cheaper was also mentioned even though half were somewhat unsure of the advantages of this option.

The lack of advantages perceived by this group of attending technical school may very well be because this particular group of students is so focused on entering a four year college. It seems that they did not even consider the option of a technical school, so they see fewer advantages in this option. Thus, in the following section they are able to list multiple disadvantages to this option because it does not seem to be the best path to them.

#### **Disadvantages of Technical School**

This group did express multiple disadvantages to technical school; these disadvantages seemed to be easier for them even though some still seemed unsure, two prepared and two under- prepared students could not come up with any disadvantages. Kerry (U), Jonathon (P), and Dontaurus (P) viewed it as limiting opportunities later in life. Dontaurus (P) stated, "That you can only get so far in technical school. Like you can't get your master's or doctorate." Sally (P), Anna (U), and Cassandra (P) pointed out that there is less access to knowledge in a technical school. Three underprepared and one prepared student said that a technical school lowered the probability of meeting new people because of the size of these schools. Brandon (P)

and Stacy (U) viewed disadvantages as the risk that others will value one's degree less than a degree from a four-year college.

### **Advantages of Working**

They viewed the main advantage of entering the work force monetarily. All stated that getting a full-time job after graduation allowed you to either earn and/or save money. Many pointed out that this option would help one pay for college, thus showing how focused this group is on attending college. It was pointed out that by working one could avoid the debt that these students fear they will incur while in school.

They also saw it as a faster way to grow up and be adults.

I guess you'll just be used to the full-time work schedule. (Stacy (U))

Get started early on retirement. (Suzy (U))

...to see what it's like to have to pay your own bills and stuff like that (Kerry (U))

### **Disadvantages of Working**

Unlike the advantages of work, which were mainly focused on the short-term outcomes, the disadvantages were more focused on long-term outcomes. Five prepared students and one underprepared student acknowledge that eventually those who enter the work force directly after high school

have less earning potential. They saw this option as limiting one throughout life:

If you go to work and you see that you really need an education or something like that... a lot of people don't go back... (Kerry (U))

That eventually you can only go so far with just a high school diploma (Dontaurs (P))

Later on careerwise you're probably going to be overlooked. (Natalie (U))

Sarah (U) and Suzy (U) viewed the main disadvantage of going straight to work to be the lack of a college education. Three underprepared students and two prepared students stated that this option leaves one limited in general.

### **Advantages of the Military**

Only one student interviewed, Stacy, is joining the military, but there were multiple advantages expressed for this option from these participants. The dominant one was the fact that the military would pay for one's education, again these students are focusing on college. Out of the eight students who viewed money for college as an advantage of the military half were prepared and half were under-prepared. Stacy (U), who is joining the military, saw the above mentioned advantage in military service. But most of them saw other advantages, primarily a sense of patriotism and the ability to help one's country. They acknowledged

the possibility of learning new skills and the future respect and job opportunities that come from military service.

### **Disadvantages of the Military**

The main disadvantages were the obvious risks involved with service and the necessity to travel away from home. Again the point that one would miss family and friends was made, "And it's being away from family. Not being able to talk to people like you usually do" (Natalie (U)). The structure, discipline, and commitment required were also seen as disadvantageous to these students.

### **Effect of Advantages and Disadvantages on Choice**

The majority of the students (10, half of whom were prepared and half of whom were underprepared) said that the above advantages and disadvantages affected their decisions as to what they are planning on doing after graduation. Two underprepared students said these advantages and disadvantages did not affect their choice at all, and three prepared students said they slightly affected their choice. Many of the students stated a sentiment similar to David's (U) when expressing why they are going to college, "...it's just something I've always been programmed to do after high school."

### **Influence of Others' Decision**

It can be assumed that the advantages and disadvantages that these students view comes partially from the experience of those around them, particularly those close to them and those that they admire. The decisions that one's parent, sibling, closest friend, or admired adult have made and the result of that decision helps to develop and enforce the views of these participants.

### **Education of Parents**

As a whole the majority of these participants' parents have some sort of postsecondary education. In this study a parent is defined as one's biological parent, stepparent, and a parent's partner; anyone that the student views as a parental figure is deemed as such. There are a total of 38 parental figures for these fifteen students.

From this group two parents did not finish high school; both are the parents of Sarah (U), whose stepparent is the only one in this study to have earned a GED. Six parents completed high school but went no farther. These six parents correlate with five participants, Jonathon (U) has two parents who stopped their education after the completion of high school. These five participants consist of three prepared and two underprepared students.

The other twenty-nine parents received anything from an AA to a Ph.D. There were four parents with an AA, which correlate with three prepared students and one under-prepared student. Eight parents, the parents of two prepared and four underprepared participants, had some college education but did not complete a degree. Some of these parents with a partial college education were in school while the student was younger. Brandon's (P) mother is currently in the process of earning a bachelor's degree.

There were two prepared students and five under-prepared students whose parents had completed their bachelor's degree. Brenda (P) had two parents with bachelor's degrees. The majority had completed it before the child was born, but a few had completed this degree during the child's lifetime. There were five parents with master's degrees; one of these five held three separate master's degrees (Cassandra's (P) mother). The children of the parents who held master's degrees were proportionally more likely to be under-prepared, with three of the four students being under-prepared for college. There were three parents who held a Ph.D., all three were males and worked at a university. It is interesting that two of the students of these three men are underprepared for college.

There are also three parents who are university professors; all three of their students are underprepared.

Generally parents held an education similar to that of their co-parents. For example, if one parent stopped completely at high school, his or her co-parent does not have a doctorate. But, there were a few situations in which one parent stopped at high school, and the other had his or her master's degree. This situation always consisted of the parent with the master's degree being a teacher; the state school-system requires them to earn a master's degree to be tenured.

The students who have a parent with a graduate degree were more likely to see no other option than attending college after high school, whether or not they are prepared. The students whose parents had received an educational level below a completed bachelor's degree were more likely to view this situation as having made their parents' lives more difficult: "My stepdad, the only job he could get was in a factory 'cause he didn't have a diploma or anything" (Stacy (U)). Regardless of the hurdles they may or may not have seen their parents experience, all but one of the students felt that their parents had provided well for them. Stacy (U) did not feel that her parents

provided well for her; she supported her family financially.

### **Education of Siblings**

All the students expressed more feeling about what their siblings have done, both positive and negative. These feelings could result from their experiences with the decision process in a sibling's choice. Five participants had no older sibling, and the other eleven had a combination of full siblings, half siblings, and stepsiblings.

Of these siblings only one had not finished high school, a stepbrother. Anna (U) expressed frustration with her stepbrother's decision and seeming lack of desire to do anything about it,

But he just doesn't really care and he still doesn't care, and he was going to get his GED but he just... In his part that's really stupid. He'll probably do that the rest of his life...

Jonathon's (P) half brother, Susan's (P) sister, and Stacy's (U) brother had earned their high school diplomas and stopped there to work. All but one of the participants who had a sibling that made this choice viewed it as a bad choice. They expressed the idea that the sibling is smart and is wasting his or her intelligence, working without



having earned a postsecondary education, "He's wicked smart, and he's working in the Minit Mart" (Stacy (U)).

Dontaurs (P) and Kerry (U) have brothers who served in the military. Both viewed this decision as hard on their families because they missed their brothers when they were on active duty and away from home. But, they also expressed feeling proud of their brothers for thier choice to serve their country

Only Anna's (U) stepsister had completed a bachelor's degree, and this accomplishment had just occurred in the previous semester. There were two siblings of under-prepared respondents and two sibling of prepared respondents who are currently enrolled in college. This situation is likely because siblings are typically close in age. All the respondents viewed the siblings in college as having made the right decision, "I think she did a really good thing going to college" (David (U)).

#### **Education of Closest Family Member**

Many of the respondents named either a parent or a sibling as their closest family member; they will not be discussed here because they have been discussed above. Some students were not able to name a single person as the closest family member and, thus, named two individuals, often a couple.

There were a total of six grandparents (three prepared respondents and one underprepared respondent) named as the closest family members, often one parent's parental unit. All the grandparents had achieved a high school diploma. One participant suspected his grandmother had postsecondary education of some sort but was unsure. The fact that grandparents stopped at high school is most likely due to the fact that in that generation in this area of the country there were fewer people who pursued postsecondary education. Even though some participants had a grandfather that entered the military, none of these men were seen as the closest family members.

All other closest family members had postsecondary education, except Dontaurs (P) whose cousin stopped his education with a high-school diploma. The other closest family members have the following levels of education: one aunt with a bachelor's degree (Sally (P)), one uncle with a bachelor's degree (Sally (P)), two cousins with bachelor's degrees (Anna (U)), and one aunt with a master's degree (Cassandra (P)). These relatives were usually the closest family members of those students who saw college as the next logical step, those who saw little choice in the decision. One can conclude that these students come from

more educated extended family units as well as more educated immediate family units.

#### Education of Closest Person at Church

The students were asked about activity in their particular religious organizations in search of influential persons at their churches. Of the fifteen respondents only six stated that they admire somebody from their church. The respondents who were found through their church had an admired person at church.

Only Anna (U) mentioned the closest person at church to be someone other than a minister or priest. She named three members of the congregation, a couple and a man. All three of these people had master's degrees and were involved in the educational system.

The other five participants named a minister or priest as the closest person at church. David (P) and Brandon (P) named their priests, Cassandra (P) named her minister, David (P) (who is himself a musician) named his music minister, and Suzy (U) and Natalie (U) named their youth minister. It is interesting to note that the two who named their youth ministers named the exact same individual and were participants found through their youth minister.

Although the people at church seemed to influence the students' rationalization process, this influence did not

seem as important as the influence of the education of family members or close friends. This association is assumed to be less influential because the students were far less sure about the educational level of these people than of other people to whom they considered themselves to be close.

#### **Education of Closest Friend**

The decision of the student's closest friend seemed to have a substantial impact on the student. This influence is assumed because fourteen out of fifteen of the respondents said their best friends were making the same choice as they themselves were making; thus, these students have similar status-attainment models. Their educational attainment is influenced by their family's social status which will in turn influence the rest of the child's life (Cook, Fine, and House 1995). The only student who said his or her closest friend was not doing the same thing was Stacy (U). Stacy (U) is entering the military and named her brother, who went straight to work after high school, as her closest friend.

Friends who are also going to college do not seem to necessarily affect, or consciously affect, the participant's decision to do the same thing. It is possible that they are friends with people who were raised

with a similar mentality about education. It is interesting that six of the prepared and three of the underprepared participants said that their closest friends will be actually going to the same school as they are; often they are planning on becoming roommates. However, only two students said the fact that their friend was attending a certain school affected their decision to attend the same institution.

### **Family Structure**

The family structures of these 15 participants are diverse and varied. There are some similarities, but each situation is rather unique.

### **Parental Situation**

Only six (half prepared students and half underprepared students) actually live with both of their biological parents. The rest of the participants lived in a single-parent home, with a stepparent, or with some combination of the two. For some students living situations have been stable since before their birth, and for others they may have changed as recently as the months previous to the interview.

**Parental Split When Child Was Young:** The nine who did not live with both biological parents had very diverse

situations. The parents of Sarah (U), Dontours (P), Brenda (P), and Anna (U) split when the children were very young.

Even though Sarah's (U) parents split before her birth she has always lived in a two-parent household. Her mother and stepfather have been married for 18 years. Her biological father comes in and out of her life as it suits him.

Dontours (P) has always lived with his mother as the only adult in the household. He does see his father and sister, who lives with his father, even though they live out of the state.

Brenda's (P) parents split when she was still a baby and she lived part of her life with just her mother. She has constant contact with her biological father but never lived with him. She currently lives with her mom and stepfather.

Anna (U) currently lives with her mother as the only adult in the house. It has been just her mother for about one year since her stepfather of ten years passed away. Her parents divorced when she was eighteen months old but she spends time with both of her parents. She splits her time equally between both biological parents' households and lived with her father for about nine months during her freshman year of high school.

Well it's kind of off and on because whoever's in town or out of town. Or like if there's, like last week there was family in town so I was with my dad for like a whole week. So now my dad's out of town this week so I'm with my mom for this whole week (Anna (U)).

**Parental Split During Child's Early Teens:** Other

participants' parents divorced during the students' early teen years. Kerry (U) has lived with her father only; she was thirteen when her parents divorced. Susan (P) lives with her mother only as she has been doing since the divorce when she was in the tenth grade.

Jonathon's (P) parents divorced when he was eleven years old, and he has lived with his father since then. Occasionally his father and he have spent time living with Jonathon's (P) paternal grandparents. All three of these participants have very limited contact with the parent they do not live with and were more reluctant to discuss the divorce and familial situation.

**Parental Split in Previous Year:** Some participants have experienced parental divorce within the last year. Cassandra's (P) parents have been divorced since the January previous to our interview in May, having been separated for a year and a half previous to the divorce. Until then she was living with both parents who still seem to have a good relationship: "And he's at the house all the

time. Like every day he just comes over to the house. They get along great."

Stacy (U) also experienced a parental split in the previous six months. Her mother and stepfather split up in February, and since then her mother has been the only adult in the house. Her biological parents divorced when she was younger, and she did live in a single-parent household for part of her youth.

**Effect of Parental Situation:** These diverse family situations do not appear to have affected the students' decision to go to college. Of all these students four prepared and four underprepared students currently live in a two-parent household, while four prepared and three underprepared students currently live in a one-parent household. Thus, it seems that living with a single parent does not really affect one's choice to go to college or how prepared one is for college. The only participant who seems to have really been affected by a marital split and remarriage is Anna (U). The addition of her stepfather into her life seems to have encouraged her to pursue a higher education.

And then we meet my stepdad and he had a doctorate, he was a professor, he was very successful. He was my inspiration and I was like you know that's what I want to do (Anna (U)).



### Siblings

Of all the participants only one was an only child, Brenda (P). Some others did not have any full siblings but did have stepsiblings and half siblings. Sarah (U), Brandon (P), Cassandra (P), and Sally (P) are the oldest children in their families. Only Sarah (U) had half siblings, the others had younger full siblings. Sarah (U) has been raised with her sisters her whole life.

Kerry (U), Joanne (P), David (U), and Jonathon (P) are the youngest children in their families. Again only one of these participants, Jonathon (P), has older siblings that are not full siblings; he has an older half brother and an older stepbrother (he is not legally a stepbrother but rather the child of his mother's partner). Neither live with him, nor does he have very much contact with his stepbrother.

The other six participants are the middle children. Natalie (U), Suzy (U), Dontaurs (P), Susan (P), and Stacy (U) all have only biological siblings. Anna (U) has two older stepsiblings from her father's remarriage; she is not close to either. She also has three younger half siblings from her mother's remarriage. Older siblings seem to affect the choice of these students more so than younger siblings. As discussed earlier, the decision that an older

sibling has made after high school influences the decision of the participant.

### **School Personnel**

It seems to be a valid assumption that the high school one attends and specifically the faculty and staff of that school have an effect on what students do after graduation. In fact, the atmosphere of the school, which is developed in part by its personnel, can have an influence on the individual. It can be assumed that all teachers, counselors, and administration have a minimum of some postsecondary education.

### **Closest Faculty/Staff at School**

There was no correlation between the gender of the student and the individual at school to whom they felt closest. Males and females were just as likely to choose members of the opposite sex as the person to whom they felt closest.

Thirteen of the participants named a teacher that they had in class as the person to whom they felt closest to. The teachers taught a variety of subjects. Two participants (one prepared and one underprepared student) named a coach as the person to whom they felt closest. Suzy (U) named a couple that coaches a team together. These coaches were also teachers, just not specifically a

teacher to the participant. In general these teachers and coaches were admired by the students and seen as being very supportive and encouraging.

He's the best teacher ever. He really relates to all the students and everything. (Jonathon (P) about his pre-calculus teacher)

I mean they're just so down to Earth. Just if I ever had a problem I would come to them. They are just such great people, and they are so nice. (Natalie (U) about the special education teachers)

David (U), in particular, really expressed a great deal of admiration for his calculus teacher. In particular, the reason she became a teacher encouraged him to really look up to her.

She worked at NASA for a couple years, and then she started to figure out that these kids couldn't do basic calculus stuff. So she's like "Well, I'm going go back to high school and start teaching high school." So she's been teaching high school for fifteen years now.

Three students said the teacher or coach was more of a friend than an authority figure to them.

He helped me out whenever my car broke down and... I went over to his house a couple of times and had dinner with his family. He's a real nice guy. (Brandon (P) about his English teacher)

I have a teacher that I've been teacher's aid for for two years. And he's like my best friend And... I feel like he's one of my friends, not my teacher. (Brenda (P) about her English teacher)

So I mean it's more of a friendship than it is a coach/player relationship although we had both.  
(Suzy (U) about her soccer coach)

Six of the prepared students and four of the underprepared students said that they discussed personal things with these individuals. They discussed things such as family life and issues with friends. Three (two prepared and one under- prepared) said they talked about selected personal things with this individual. These three would talk about issues they were having at school but not about things at home. Sarah (U) said that she does not really talk to the individual about anything. Sarah (U) seems to admire this teacher more since she has developed a close personal relationship with the teacher.

Some of these students discussed their future plans with these individuals. A total of three prepared and three underprepared students said that they specifically talked about their future plans with these persons. It seems they talked to their teachers or coaches mostly as a sounding board and or for advice. They seem to have taken these teachers' and coaches' advice seriously and to heart. These teachers and coaches may not have been the sole factors in students' decision as to what to do after graduation, but the implied influence was there. It seems that the teachers

and coaches were supportive of whatever decision the student made.

### **Guidance Counselors**

The general impression that I received was that these students did not think very highly of their guidance counselors. None of them expressed admiration for their counselors. Only a few said that their counselors really helped them with personal issues.

Four students were very specific about the fact that they felt that the counselor was not good at his or her job. Brandon (P) stated that, "She didn't really guide or counsel so I don't know how she earned the title guidance counselor."

Two students felt that the counselors were too nosey and tried to invade their lives too much. Stacy (U) said she used to talk to her counselor but stopped because she did not like the fact that the counselor would bring up previous conversations every time she saw her. This behavior is obviously part of the counselor's role, but Stacy (U) felt that she should be the one to bring up issues when necessary.

Anna (U) felt that they tried to get too involved in things that were not any of their concern. She cited how

she feels the counselors made a situation worse for one of her friends.

And the situation would have been totally fine and then the school got involved, and our counselor got involved, and it just blew everything out of proportion.

Natalie (U) felt that the counselor did not do a great deal for her outside of answering scholarship questions and setting up a schedule. She felt as if they were overloaded. But, she did feel that the guidance secretary was very helpful and supportive,

I really went to our secretary of the guidance office so she was like a mom to me at school. She helped me with a lot.

David (U) did not feel very positively about his guidance counselor. David (U) was upset by the fact that the guidance counselor tried to convince him to be a doctor rather than a musician because of his good grades. He felt this pressure was ridiculous and stopped talking to his counselor after this occurrence.

Jonathon (P), on the other hand, had mixed feelings about his counselor. He stated that he was thankful when the counselor helped him through some difficult times earlier in his high-school career. But, he does not appreciate the counselor's opinion about what he should do after graduation.

My counselor's actually kind of discouraging because when I go to him and I talk to him about stuff, you know, his attitude is that like I'm not good enough. But that just kind of makes me want to do it more you know.

Five prepared students and one underprepared student stated that they spent a lot of time talking to their guidance counselors. They spent the majority of the time talking about their future but said the counselors did not have much influence over their decisions. It seems that they spent most of the time with their counselors getting papers signed and obtaining scholarship information. A logical inference may be that many of these students were not close to their guidance counselors because there is not much opportunity for the frequent contact there is with teachers and coaches.

#### **School's Preparations for the Future**

The students had varied responses regarding how well their school prepared them for the future, in spite of the school they attended. Despite their level of preparedness students had very different opinions about how a single school prepared them for what lay ahead in their life.

Four prepared and two underprepared students felt that their school definitely helped them prepare for the future. Two could not give specifics but just felt that their schools did a good job on this aspect of their education.

Joanne (P) said that she felt the majority of the reason that she feels prepared is because of the advanced-placement classes in which she was involved.

It's because I'm in AP classes, like, they actually prepare you, I think, for college... And I think the AP classes are most like that 'cause it's not like here, write definitions, memorize this. It's more a discussion kind of thing, thinking.

One prepared and two underprepared students said that high school did prepare them, considering the situation public schools are in. They felt issues such as funding and problem students made it difficult for the schools to function well in their role.

One prepared and three underprepared participants unequivocally said that their schools did not prepare them for the future. Cassandra (P) felt very strongly that the schools were not functioning well but saw it as a problem created by those in higher positions. She felt that the state requirements for students are too low, there is a lack of funding, there is no incentive for teachers to work harder, and there is a lack of support for teachers from their superiors. These four students had different levels of scholarships, and some seemed more focused on academics than others.



Brenda (P) and Suzy (U) felt that school was made too easy and they were not challenged enough. David (U), felt that the school administration spent too much energy on unimportant issues such as a dress code when they should be focusing this energy on academics.

One student, Sarah (U), felt that there was not enough reality in school. She felt as if there should be less book learning and more hands-on training involved. This response was confusing because she is planning on going to college, which involves a great deal of book learning. She also felt that the teachers do not put enough effort into their jobs because they are not paid enough.

Three prepared and two underprepared students felt that their schools prepared them in some ways but were lacking in other ways. Three felt that the schools were trying to help them but just not trying enough. Two felt that the schools succeeded at teaching them life lessons but that they did not succeed at teaching them academics.

I hardly ever studied in high school. I think that is going to be a real problem next year, I'm going to have to learn how to study. But life lessons, yes. Soccer's helped out a lot. Getting along with people that disagree with you some.  
(Suzy (U))

They felt that school was not difficult enough, that there was little that challenged them.

### **Academics**

This section on academics consists partially of the grades a student earns. It also includes the type of diploma that they earned as well as their college entrance tests, the ACT and the SAT.

#### **Track**

There was little consistency in the students' understanding of their track system. All three schools have a track system, basically different types of diplomas that can be earned. The difference lies in what classes the student completes. One prepared student claimed that her school did not have a track system, and one under-prepared student said that she did not know what track she was on.

There was also confusion as to what each diploma was actually named so they described what types of classes they had taken and what the diploma prepared them to do after completion. Only one student (underprepared) had the diploma that was not geared toward college. She is planning on attending a community college and then transferring to a four-year institution. The other seven prepared and five underprepared students all had the diploma geared toward college, including the student who is

entering the military. All the students said they chose the diploma that they earned.

### Grades

I did not ask the students for their actual grades or GPA but rather asked them what kind of students they considered themselves to be. It is logical that they based this answer on the grades they earned, and some gave me their exact GPA. One student who was prepared gave me a "could have earned" grade and an actual grade; this distinction was interesting because the "could have earned" grade suggested his actual grades should have been higher. The student explained that he makes little effort at school.

Four prepared and four underprepared students felt that they were solid A students. They were confident about this ranking, and most said that they worked very hard for their grades. Two prepared and two underprepared participants felt that they were B students, and some explained that they had better things to do than study and that is why they are not A students.

'Cause I make good grade on tests and everything,  
but my scores kind of drop when I don't do  
homework. (Dontaurs (P))

An A, it like, takes more time, and, I don't  
know, it takes this will power. Because for me  
to sit and like study, I can do it, but it has to

be the condition that I'm in... For a B it's just, it's your there. (Anna (U))

Brandon (P) felt he was an A/B student, and Jonathon (P) felt he was a B/C student; both are entering a four year college. Only Sarah (U) felt herself to be a C student; she is entering the community college. Stacy (U), who is entering the military, felt herself to be an A student.

Overall, this group of students seems to be academically inclined. This fact may be part of the reason that the majority is entering college. These high grades probably also contribute to the fact that many of them have scholarships secured for college.

### **ACT/SAT**

The ACT scores of these students are very scattered (see Chapter IV), unlike their grades. This spread could be either because they incorrectly reported their grades or, more likely, they work hard for their grades and studied very little for the ACT.

Because all those who took the ACT are going to college there appears to be no significance on that point. It is interesting that more of those who received higher test scores considered no alternative to the choice to go

to college; they felt it was expected of them. The student with the lowest ACT score, 16, said:

I just want to prove to people that, you know, just 'cause [you] come out [of] a bad situation or, you know, upbringing or whatever, you can still go ahead and go to college and make something of yourself (Kerry (U)).

### **Extracurricular Involvement**

The amount of time that students are involved in activities outside of class is an important aspect to consider. Not only the fact that they are involved in activities but also the activities with which they are involved provide some insight.

### **Attendance at School Events**

Each participant was asked how many school events they go to voluntarily. Basically I wanted to know what events they go to that they are not actively involved in. This participation shows their involvement with the school atmosphere in general.

Four prepared and two underprepared students said they do not attend school events of which they are not a part or they very rarely attend such school events. The general reasons these students gave for not attending school events more were they did not find them entertaining and/or they feel that they have better things to do with their time.

Brandon (P) and Stacy (U) said that they go to some events, which are mostly sporting events. The other seven students (four prepared and three underprepared students) said that they attended a lot of events. They attend mostly sporting events, predominantly football and basketball games. Most of the students go to events to socialize with their friends. It is more of a time to hang out than to necessarily pay attention to the activities.

Some go to support the people involved in activities, mostly when their friends are involved. Stacy (U) said she goes to football games because she enjoys watching the sport. This attendance at activities shows the students' involvement and desire to be an active individual in their community. It can also help us to see which students enjoy the academic setting.

#### **Involvement in Activities**

Generally these were pretty involved students who were involved in anywhere from two to fourteen activities. Five underprepared students and three prepared students were involved in sports, two students in rec teams and the other six in school teams. Many of them were involved in more than one sport.

One underprepared and two prepared students were involved in band at school, and one underprepared student

was a member of a gospel group. Two underprepared students were involved in their church youth groups, and two prepared students were involved in student council. Three prepared and two underprepared students were involved in some sort of honors society that they were placed in because of their grades. Two of the students (one prepared and one under- prepared) volunteered in the community. Six prepared and four underprepared students had a job at some point in high school where they worked anywhere from ten to forty hours a week.

There were various reasons for being involved in all of these activities. They were involved in sports for the fun, the exercise it provided, and/or because a friend also played. They were involved in the clubs either because it was something they enjoyed doing or a teacher encouraged them to join. The majority of the students worked to have extra money and to save up for college, with the exception of Stacy. She was working to support her family because none of her parents had a job; she worked forty hours a week during school.

### **Strongest Influence on Choice**

The answers given as to what provided the strongest influence on their decision were rather varied. Stacy (U),

who is entering the military, stated she was doing so because

Well, the main reason is you know, Iraq. I've always wanted to serve our country. Oh, my gosh. And, you know, I think if I go over there, then they can come home so I'll do that (Stacy).

Of the college-bound students, two prepared and two underprepared stated that there was no decision; thus, in their minds nothing influenced this decision. There was no consistency in the level of education of parents among these four participants.

Sarah (U), Anna(U), and Susan (P) said that their parents' encouragement was the biggest influence on their choice. Only Jonathon (P) said the fact that his high school promoted college was the biggest influence.

Anna (U) and Sarah (U) both said their biggest influence was what their parents' had been able to accomplish with their education. Anna (U) pointed out how different her life had been when it was just she and her mother compared to when her stepfather (who had a Ph.D) joined the family.

Well, my mom she went to college like part-time, and she ended up being like a manager at --- and I don't think that's such a big whoop. And, it was just her and I, and we really lived paycheck by paycheck trying to make ends meet, and I don't want my family to have to live like that when I grow up, I don't want to live like that again.



Sarah (U) simply wants to have an easier time than her parents had.

Well, neither one of my parents graduated from high school or went to college so I just want to make something of myself.

Four of the students did not name a person as being their biggest influence. David (U) believes he needs more training, and that has been his strongest determinant.

Cassandra (P) has a desire to have a well paid job and views college as the best way to achieve that goal.

Sally's (P) view is very similar to Cassandra's (P).

I've met people who have gone to college and who haven't, and I'd rather be like the ones who did.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Originally I intended to analyze students by their postgraduation choice, but given the fact that most of these participants made the choice to go to college the focus changed slightly. Comparisons of these students, mostly college bound, have been made based on the students' ACT scores. Students are analyzed to decipher the differences between students who are considered prepared and those who are considered underprepared as well as other commonalties and differences among this group of students.

#### **Effects of Advantages and Disadvantages on Choice**

It appears that the majority of these students' choices were affected by what they personally viewed as being the advantages or disadvantages of the four possible options after high-school graduation. The majority admitted that their choice was directly linked to the advantages and disadvantages they perceived with each option. The students compared all the alternatives and chose the option that seems to have the most favorable outcome.

Some did claim that there was no decision to be made, and, thus, the advantages and disadvantages of each choice played no part in their decision. I perceive that even these students did make a decision even though they claimed that there was none to make. The advantages and disadvantages of each choice seemed to make the decision a rather obvious one, probably at a much earlier age, to these participants. A student's level of preparedness did not seem to affect the advantages and disadvantages they viewed of each choice.

#### **Influence of Others on Choice**

Other people did seem to impact the students' decisions as to postgraduation activities. The educational level of the participants' parents seemed to have some impact on the reasoning that the students gave for their choices. Those whose parents had higher academic degrees saw less of an option; attending college was expected of them. Those whose parents had a lower level of education chose to go to college in order to improve themselves and make their lives easier than those of their parents. The lower the parental level of education the more likely the student is to be prepared. Perhaps college seems less definite to this group so they have worked harder.

The effect of the choice of an older sibling is somewhat an extension of the education of the parents who also influenced the siblings' choices. Students whose siblings went to college were anxious to follow the path that their siblings had carved out for them. In some cases the participants were attending the same institutions of higher learning that their siblings were attending. They are already aware of the social approval that they will gain from their family for the choice to go to college. For the participants whose siblings made a choice that the participants considered unwise, the participants' choices were a way to do what, in the students minds, the older siblings should have done. There seems to be no correlation between a siblings' education and a participants' level of preparedness.

The educational level of the student's closest family member and of the closest person at church did not seem to have any impact on the student's choice. The family member was typically valued for things other than education. The educational level of the closest family member was typically in sync with that of the parents and the siblings. It seems that the lower the educational level of the closest family member the higher the probability that the participant is prepared. The educational level of the

closest person at church is assumed to have little impact because most of the participants were very unsure about the educational level of these people.

The choice of their closest friends seems to either have a big effect or just be proof of social homogeneity. Most of these participants were doing the same things as their closest friends but did not think that the friends were part of the reason for the decision. Thus, one can conclude that this situation might occur because people who are similar to each other tend to become friends with each other.

### **Family Structure**

Family structure did not seem to have very much effect on these students' decisions. The only one who cited family structure as part of her decision was Stacy (U). Stacy (U) views the military partially as a way to escape her troubled home life.

A parent's marital situation has no effect on a student's choice as to what to do after high school. There is no difference between those whose biological parents are married and those who have single parents or stepparents. Furthermore, the age of the student when their parents divorced also seems to have no effect on the students' postgraduation decision or their level of preparedness.

Birth order seems to have a slight effect on how prepared one is for college. Three of four eldest-child participants in this study are prepared, while two of four youngest-child participants are prepared. In addition, four of six middle child participants are underprepared.

### **School Personnel**

The individual that the student felt closest to at school seemed to affect the student in the sense that this was a person who was a college-educated person with whom the student felt a bond. These people seemed to be more of a support system for the decision that had been made rather than having any actual influence over the decision or the student's level of preparedness.

The guidance counselors seem to have either a negative impact or none at all. Many of the students did not care for their guidance counselors, thus giving this person less influence over such an important decision. A few seemed to think that their guidance counselors were of no use in the pursuit of post-graduation choices.

Most of these students did not feel that their school prepared them for the future. This feeling was expressed about all three schools. School C, which is composed of students from higher socio-economic-status families, seemed to have more underprepared students proportionally. School

A had two underprepared students and three prepared students; school B had two prepared students; and school C had five underprepared students and three prepared students. The fact that so many underprepared students from school C are going to college shows the class status of college in that school. These students are expected to go to college whether or not they are prepared to do so. The culture of their school pushes them to go to college. Their school has encouraged them to place the reward of a college education over any possible costs.

#### **Academics**

It appears that a student's grades have no impact on the postgraduation choice; there was an A student entering the military and a C student entering college. It might also appear that the academic track that these students are on has no effect because so many were on similar tracks. Rather, the tracks might be an indication that the majority of these students knew what they were doing after high-school graduation before they began high school. Furthermore, the track they were on did not affect how prepared they were for the college experience.

ACT scores also seemed to have little effect on the students' choices. The score of the student did affect the students' perception of the validity of the test. Those

who received lower-than-average scores justified this score by claiming that such tests were unimportant. Thus, students who were underprepared blamed the test instead of their own lack of preparation.

When it comes down to it, I think it's more if you're a good test taker. I really don't think it does so much. (Natalie (U))

### **Extracurricular Involvement**

The majority of these students seemed to be active members of their schools. They attended school events and were involved in school activities regardless of whether they were prepared students. This involvement shows that they are students who enjoy the school setting and, thus, in part, the academic world. They would, thus, be more likely to pursue a path to stay in this world rather than to enter the nonacademic world.

### **Relevance of Social Exchange Theory**

These students view the rewards of attending college as outweighing the costs of this option, more so than with the other options that they have. They acknowledge that there are immediate costs to attending college but feel that the long term rewards of attending college far outweigh the immediate costs.

Their school and for the most part their families seem to have given social approval to the option of attending



college. This social approval seems to be the most influential benefit for some. This approval is given to students regardless of their level of preparedness. These students have also seen the effects of others' choices on their life outcomes. They have based their choice to attend college partially on the success and failures of others, most often seeing those with a college degree as successful.

### **Limitations**

The majority of the participants in this study planned to attend college. This fact was an unintended consequence of the method I used to find and entice individuals to participate in my study. Because it was purely voluntary, the only students who agreed were ones that had something intangible to gain from the experience.

Thus, those going to college seemed more curious and stimulated to participate in this study. In addition, many students agreed to participate, scheduled an appointment, and then failed to be present at the appointed time. Fifteen appointments were broken. These may have been students that were unambitious or simply fearful of sharing their choice.

It is possible the students that agreed to talk to me did so for several reasons. One was that I was linked to

an institution that they were planning to attend or at least one similar to what they would attend. Cassandra actually told me that she agreed to talk to me because she felt that she would one day probably have to do something similar so she could sympathize with my experience.

It is also possible that these were the only students to talk to me because they thought I would be supportive of their decision, whereas those who made other decisions feared I would be disapproving. Students who go to college gain more support from society in general, which is geared toward going to college. They have been constantly reassured that they are making the right choice so there is no fear on their part that they could be negatively sanctioned for this decision. Students who make other decisions may not have this overall encouragement and sense of security about their decision.

Another possibility may be in the way in which I reached potential participants. Although no bias seemed apparent to me, the schools may have steered me towards homeroom classes that contained their better students. However, this possibility does not account for the participants I contacted through avenues other than their schools.

### **Further Research**

I was informed over and over again that college is the best choice, the best way to achieve great things in life. It is obvious that we have ingrained this thought into our children very well. They were all convinced that going to college is the best thing to do, and only a few acknowledged that college might not be the best thing for everybody. The rest believed that everybody should go to college.

It, thus, seems to be that the problem with Kentucky's lack of people with a bachelor's degree is not in getting students to start college but rather in getting them to finish. It might be that students are not prepared for all that college demands of them. A few of the students even stated that they fear that they are not prepared for what is ahead. They seem aware that there is a rather strong chance that they do not possess the skills needed to succeed in college.

Further research could be done in this area. It seems that if a study similar to this were attempted, all students should be interviewed during the school day. This approach might encourage more volunteers among students who are not planning to go to college. In addition, the

possibility of a monetary reward might also help the attendance at interviews.

It would be interesting to interview the students at an earlier time in their academic career. Most of these students seemed to have made their postgraduation decision long before their senior year. Possibly a study as to why students choose their academic track might better explain the reasons that students make their postgraduation decisions.

## APPENNDIX A

### Student Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in research for a thesis project, entitled "High School Seniors' Plans after Graduation," that is part of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Sociology from Western Kentucky University. The nature and general purpose of this study have been explained, and Yasamin Shariat from the Sociology Department at Western Kentucky University has read the following statement to me.

The purpose of this investigation is to find out what high school seniors plan to do after graduation and what influences their decisions. This information should be helpful to future educators and parents. Each student participant will be asked a series of questions in a one-on-one interview with me. The interviews will be tape-recorded, and a copy will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Department of Sociology for three years. However, all names will be kept confidential and will not appear anywhere in the paper.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that all information is confidential and my identity will not be revealed; I am free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time; any questions I may have about the project will be answered by Yasamin Shariat or by the Human Subjects Administrator for WKU, Dr. Phillip E. Myers (telephone 270-745-4652, email phillip.myers@wku.edu). There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study.

Western Kentucky University and the investigator named below have responsibility for ensuring that participants in research projects are safeguarded from injury or harm resulting from such participation. If appropriate, the person named below may be contacted for remedy or assistance for any possible consequences from such activities.

On the basis of the above statements, I agree to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participants' Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Yasamin Shariat  
270-303-7713  
yasamin.shariat@wku.edu

## APPENDIX B

### Parent/Legal Guardian Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in research for a thesis, entitled "High School Seniors' Plans after Graduation," that is part of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Sociology from Western Kentucky University. The nature and general purpose of this study have been explained, and Yasamin Shariat from the Sociology Department at Western Kentucky University has read the following statement to your child.

The purpose of this investigation is to find out what high school seniors plan to do after graduation and what influences their decisions. This information should be helpful to future educators and parents. Each student participant will be asked a series of questions in a one-on-one interview with me. The interviews will be tape-recorded, and a copy will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Department of Sociology for three years. However, all names will be kept confidential and will not appear anywhere in the paper.

Your child's participation in this study is purely voluntary, all information is confidential and your child's identity will not be revealed. Your child is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation at any time. Any questions you may have about the project will be answered by Yasamin Shariat or by the Human Subjects Administrator for WKU, Dr. Phillip E. Myers (telephone 270-745-4652, email phillip.myers@wku.edu). There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study.

Western Kentucky University and the investigator named below have responsibility for ensuring that participants in research projects are safeguarded from injury or harm resulting from such participation. If appropriate, the person named below may be contacted for remedy or assistance for any possible consequences from such activities.

On the basis of the above statements, I agree to permit my child to participate in this project.

Your Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Yasamin Shariat  
270-303-7713  
yasamin.Shariat@wku.edu

**APPENDIX C**  
**Student Informed Assent Form**

You are being asked to participate in research for a thesis project, entitled "High School Seniors' Plans after Graduation," that is part of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Sociology from Western Kentucky University. The nature and general purpose of this study have been explained, and Yasamin Shariat from the Sociology Department at Western Kentucky University has read the following statement to me.

The purpose of this investigation is to find out what high school seniors plan to do after graduation and what influences their decisions. This information should be helpful to future educators and parents. Each student participant will be asked a series of questions in a one-on-one interview with me. The interviews will be tape-recorded, and a copy will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Department of Sociology for three years. However, all names will be kept confidential and will not appear anywhere in the paper.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that all information is confidential and my identity will not be revealed; I am free to withdraw assent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time; any questions I may have about the project will be answered by Yasamin Shariat or by the Human Subjects Administrator for WKU, Dr. Phillip E. Myers (telephone 270-745-4652, email phillip.myers@wku.edu). There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study.

Western Kentucky University and the investigator named below have responsibility for ensuring that participants in research projects are safeguarded from injury or harm resulting from such participation. If appropriate, the person named below may be contacted for remedy or assistance for any possible consequences from such activities.

On the basis of the above statements, I agree to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Yasamin Shariat  
270-303-7713  
yasamin.shariat@wku.edu

**APPENDIX D**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS BY YASAMIN SHARIAT**

1. How old are you?

Advantages and Disadvantages of Each Option

I am going to ask you some questions about the pros and cons of four possible choices you have after high-school graduation.

2. What are the advantages of going to college?
3. What are the disadvantages of going to college?
4. What are the advantages of going to a technical school?
5. What are the disadvantages of going to a technical school?
6. What are the advantages of gaining full-time employment?
7. What are the disadvantages of gaining full-time employment?
8. What are the advantages of entering the military?
9. What are the disadvantages of entering the military?

Future Plans

10. What are your long term goals in life?  
Why?
11. What do your parents want you to do when you get older?  
How has this affected your decision?
12. What do you plan to do after high school?  
More details?
13. What was the biggest influence on that decision?



14. Are your plans after graduation what you have always wanted to do?  
If not, what did you want to do?

IF PLANNING TO GO TO COLLEGE

15. What school are you planning to go to?
16. Is that the only school you applied to?  
If not, were you accepted at the other schools?  
If you were accepted, why did you pick that school?
17. How are you planning on paying for college?  
Is your family paying? If not, why not?  
Any grants, scholarships, KEYS, Duke Talent Search, etc? Which ones? How much of your expenses will they cover? Are you using all available aid?  
Are you planning to work to help with college expenses?
18. Did you base this choice, to go to college, on the advantages and disadvantages we discussed earlier?  
Why or why not?

IF PLANNING TO GO TO A TECHNICAL SCHOOL

19. What skill are you planning to study?
20. Why did you choose that skill?
21. Is the technical school you are planning on attending here in Warren County?  
If not, then where is it?
22. Who is paying for your classes?  
If family, would they have been willing to pay for a university as well?  
If scholarships, grants, loans, etc. then which ones and how much of your tuition will they cover?  
Are you planning on working to help with expenses?
23. Was going to a technical school your first choice?  
If not, what was?

24. Do you have any older friends or siblings who attended a technical school?
25. Did you base this choice, to go to a technical school, on the advantages and disadvantages we discussed earlier?  
Why or why not?

IF PLANNING TO GO TO WORK

26. Do you have a job now?  
What is it?  
Do you receive school credit?  
Why do you work? For what do you use the money?
27. Do you already have a job lined up?  
If so, what is it?  
If not, what kind of job are you planning to get?
28. Will this job pay for future schooling?
29. Where do you plan to live?
30. What was the main influence that helped you decide to go straight to work?
31. Do you plan to get a higher education later on?  
If so, why are you waiting?
32. Did you base this choice, to gain full-time employment, on the advantages and disadvantages we discussed earlier?  
Why or why not?

If PLANNING ON ENTERING THE MILITARY

33. What branch are you going into?
34. Do you have any family members or friends in the military?
35. Did a recruiter come to talk to you in school?
36. What is your main reason for entering the military?  
(Possibly money for school?)

37. Did you base this choice, to enter the military, on the advantages and disadvantages we discussed earlier?  
Why or why not?

#### School Influences

38. What is your favorite class in school?  
Why?
39. What class do you consider yourself to be the best at?  
Why?
40. Do you consider school to be one of your strong points?  
If yes, why?  
If no, then what are your strong points?
41. To what teacher or person on campus do you feel closest?  
What is that person's job here on campus?  
Describe what types of things you talk about with that person?
42. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities?  
If not, why not?  
If yes, which ones, and what is your role (if applicable)?  
Why did you choose to participate in that activity?  
How much time per week do you spend participating in extracurricular activities?
43. Do you think your school has prepared you for the future?  
Explain.
44. Have you taken the ACT/SAT?  
Why/why not?  
Would you mind sharing your approximate score with me?  
Has this affected your future plans at all?

45. What type of student do you consider yourself to be?  
A,B,C,D student?  
Why?
46. What track are you on?  
When were you placed on that track?  
Do you feel this track coincides with you future plans?

#### Family Influences

47. How many brothers and sisters do you have?  
How old are they?
48. If any are older siblings what did they (or are they doing) after high school graduation?  
What do you think about their choices?
49. With whom do you live?  
How long have you lived with them?  
If you have not always lived with them, whom did you live with before?  
If necessary, explain whom you spend more time living with: Mom or Dad.
50. Where do your parents work?  
What do they do?
51. What is their highest level of education?
52. Do you think your parents have been able to provide well for you (and your siblings)?  
Explain.
53. Are you married or engaged?
54. Do you have any children?  
If yes, do they live with you?  
Who is paying their expenses?
55. What is your ethnicity?  
Is English your first language?
56. To whom in your family do you feel closest?  
Why?  
What is that person's educational level?

What did he or she do after high school?

### Religious Influences

57. Are you part of a religious organization?  
Is it something you do with your family or  
something you do on your own?
58. Are you an active part of this organization?
59. Is there anyone there that you admire or look up  
to?  
Why?  
What is his or her educational level?  
What did he or she do after high school?

### Social Life

60. Do you consider yourself to be a social person (do  
you prefer to spend time with other people or by  
yourself?)  
Why?
61. How many times a week do you hang out with friends  
from school or outside of school?  
What do you do when you are hanging out?
62. Do you socialize more with people from your school  
or from other places? Why? What are those places  
How did you meet the friends that do not go to your  
school?
63. To which of your friends do you feel closest?  
Why?  
What are their plans after high school, or what  
are they doing?
64. How many times a semester do you attend school  
events.  
What events do you attend?  
Why do you go or not go?
65. How many times a semester do you talk to your  
school counselor?  
What has he or she encouraged you to do after  
graduation?

Does that advice make sense to you?  
Why or why not?

66. Overall, what is your favorite activity?  
Why?

67. Is there anything else that you would like to  
mention that you think might enhance my research.

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me.  
I appreciate it.

## APPENDIX E

### PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

	Anna	Brandon	Brenda
Age	18	18	18
Gender	F	M	F
Race	W	W	W
High School	C	B	A
Postgrad. Plans	College	College	College
Strongest Influence	Mom and stepdad's education	No decision	No decision
ACT Score	18	26/25	25
Grades	B+	A/B	A
Biological Mother's Education	Some college	Working on B.A.	B.A.
Biological Mothers' Occupation	Mother	Medical billing	Teacher
Biological Father's Education	Some college	A.A	B.A.
Biological Father's Occupation	Business owner	Technical specialist	Sales rep
Stepmother's Education	M.A	NA	A.A.
Stepmother's Occupation	Teacher	NA	Business owner
Stepfather's Education	Ph.D	NA	Some college ?
Stepfather's Occupation	Prof./ Deceased	NA	Factory manager
Closest Family Member's Education	B.A/ M.A	Working on Diploma	B.A.
# of full siblings	0	1	0
# of halfsiblings	3	0	0
# of stepsiblings	2	0	0

	Cassandra	David	Dontaurs
Age	18	18	18
Gender	F	M	M
Race	W	W	B
High School	C	C	B
Postgrad. Plans	College	College	College
Strongest Influence	Desire to have a well paid job	Need the training	Mom promoted
ACT Score	28	19	22
Grades	A	A	B
Biological Mother's Education	M.A.	B.A.	Some college
Biological mothers' Occupation	None	Receptionist	Factory worker
Biological Father's Education	M.A.	M.A	A.A
Biological Father's Occupation	Remelt manager	Prof.	Computer programmer
Stepmother's Education	NA	NA	NA
Stepmother's Occupation	NA	NA	NA
Stepfather's Education	NA	NA	NA
Stepfather's Occupation	NA	NA	NA
Closest Family Member's Education	M.A	Working on B.A	Diploma
# of full siblings	1	1	2
# of halfsiblings	0	0	0
# of stepsiblings	0	0	0



	Joanne	Jonathon	Kerry
Age	18	18	18
Gender	F	M	F
Race	W	W	W
High School	A	C	A
Postgrad. Plans	College	College	College
Strongest Influence	No decision	School promoted	Prove she can do it
ACT Score	30	21/23	16
Grades	A	B/C	B
Biological Mother's Education	Diploma	Diploma	A.A.
Biological mothers' Occupation	Administrator's Assistant	Pharmacy delivery	Bus driver
Biological Father's Education	Some college	Diploma	Diploma
Biological Father's Occupation	Plumber	Factory worker	Business owner
Stepmother's Education	NA	AA*	NA
Stepmother's Occupation	NA	Pharmacy Delivery	NA
Stepfather's Education	NA	NA	?
Stepfather's Occupation	NA	NA	?
Closest Family Member's Education	Some college	Some college? /Diploma	Diploma
# of full siblings	1	0	1
# of halfsiblings	0	1	0
# of stepsiblings	0	1**	0
	* This is a partner. ** This is the son of the partner.		

	Natalie	Sally	Sarah
Age	18	17	18
Gender	F	F	F
Race	W	W	W
High School	C	C	C
Postgrad. Plans	College	College	College
Strongest Influence	No decision	Prefer to be a college graduate	Parent's education
ACT Score	20/21	29	20
Grades	A	A-	C
Biological Mother's Education	M.A	B.A	9th grade
Biological mothers' Occupation	Retired teacher	Fire safety tech	Mother
Biological Father's Education	Diploma	Ph.D.	no diploma
Biological Father's Occupation	Business owner	University administrator	Corrections officer
Stepmother's Education	NA	NA	NA
Stepmother's Occupation	NA	NA	NA
Stepfather's Education	NA	NA	GED
Stepfather's Occupation	NA	NA	Manager at factory
Closest Family Member's Education	Process of B.A.	B.A/ B.A	9th grade
# of full siblings	2	1	0
# of halfsiblings	0	0	2
# of stepsiblings	0	0	0

	Stacy	Susan	Suzy
Age	17	18	18
Gender	F	F	F
Race	W	W	W
High School	A	A	C
Postgrad. Plans	Military	College	College
Strongest Influence	The current war	Mom	Parental promotion
ACT Score	NA	21	19/18
Grades	A-	B	A
Biological Mother's Education	Some college	GED/ some college	B.A
Biological mothers' Occupation	Mother/ none	Crisis worker	Teacher
Biological Father's Education	Some college	Diploma	Ph.D.
Biological Father's Occupation	Disabled/ none	Factory worker	Prof.
Stepmother's Education	NA	NA	NA
Stepmother's Occupation	NA	NA	NA
Stepfather's Education	Diploma ?	NA	NA
Stepfather's Occupation	None	NA	NA
Closest Family Member's Education	Diploma	Diploma/ Diploma	B.A
# of full siblings	2	2	2
# of halfsiblings	0	0	0
# of stepsiblings	0	0	0

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